(i) provide for functions and powers of the National Bank in relation to thrift services and micro financial services;

(j) provide for constitution of Micro Finance Development and Equity Fund to be utilized for the development of micro finance sector;

(k) empower the National Bank to frame a scheme for appointment of one or more Micro Finance Ombudsman for settlement of disputes between eligible clients and Micro Finance Organisations;

(l) provide for offences and penalties for non-compliance with the regulatory requirements of the Bill;

(m) to empower Central Government to prescribe Rules for carrying out the purposes of the Bill;

(n) to empower the National Bank to make regulations with the previous approval of the Central Government for carrying out the purposes of the Bill.

Grant for construction of Narmada Main Canal

*572. SHRI VIJAYKUMAR RUPANI: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is inclined to provide special financial grant for construction of Narmada Main Canal; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ): (a) and (b) The Government of India is providing financial assistance under Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme for expeditious completion of Narmada Main Canal and its distribution net work. Total Central Assistance provided to the Sardar Sarovar Project including Narmada Main Canal since its inclusion in AIBP is of Rs. 5375.3585 crore which also includes Rs. 1344.8585 crore as grant.

Losses to Indian carriers

†*573. MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA:
SHRI MOTILAL VORA:

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that most of the airlines are running in losses;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government has taken any steps to bring these airlines out of the red;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) whether flights of Indian are proposed to be linked to Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh and Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A combination of factors such as high Aviation

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices, rising employee costs ageing fleet and intense price competition among the airline operators have been the main reasons for the losses. The erstwhile Air India and Indian Airlines have incurred a net loss of Rs. 447.93 crores and Rs. 240.29 crores respectively during the year 2006-07.

(c) and (d) In order to improve the operational performance and profitability, the Government has approved the merger of Air India and Indian Airlines into National Aviation Company of India Limited.

Further, the airlines have been permitted to add more capacity by purchasing 111 state-of-the-art new aircraft. Other commercial measures such as route rationalization along with introduction of services on new routes, product improvement and joining of 'Star Alliance' have been taken by NACIL. These are expected to boost the profits of the company.

(e) while Air India (IC) links Raipur and Bhopal with air connectivity to/from Delhi and Mumbai, there is no proposal at present to operate between Raipur and Bhopal.

Unutilized money with RBI

*574. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that more then 80,000 crore rupees of Government remain unutilized with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI);

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps proposed to be taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) to (c) No Sir. The cash balances vary on a day to day basis. The cash balances of the Government of India keep fluctuating based on revenue receipts, market borrowings, investments by State Governments in auction treasury bills, intermediate treasury bills, and drawdown on cash balances to meet various items of Government expenditure. The cash balance of the Government of India as on April 28, 2008 deposited with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was Rs. 16802 crore. In comparison, as on March 31, 2008, cash balance of Government of India deposited with RBI was Rs. 56,686 crore. Besides, this, Government of India also held an investment balance of Rs. 20,000 crore with RBI.

In terms of Section 21(1) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act, 1934, the Central Government shall entrust the Bank, on such conditions as may be agreed upon, with all its money, remittance, exchange and banking transactions in India, and in particular, shall deposit free of interest all its cash balances with the Banks.

Import duty on newsprint

*575. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Indian Newspaper Society has represented for scrapping the proposed import duty on newsprint and printing machinery which is straining the fiscal viability of print media industry;